



On Campus with Max Shulman

(Author of "Barefoot Boy With Check," etc.)

DECEMBER AND MAY: ACT I

Of all the creatures that inhabit the earth, none is so fair, so warm, so toothsome, as a coed.

This is a simple fact, well-known to every campus male, and, to most campus males, a source of rejoicing. But not to all. To some, the creamy brows and twinkling limbs of coeds are a bane and a burden. To whom? To professors, that's whom.

Professors, according to latest scientific advice, are human. Stick them and they bleed, pinch them and they hurt, ring a dinner bell and they salivate, confront them with a round young coed and their ears go back, even as yours and mine.

But, by and large, they contain themselves. After all, they are men of high principle and decorum, and besides, the board of regents has got stoolies all over. So, by and large, they contain themselves.

But not always. Every now and then a coed will come along who is just too gorgeous to resist, and a professor - his clutch worn out from years of struggle - will slip and fall. White though his hair, multitudinous though his degrees, Phi Beta Kappa though his key, he is as lovesick, moonstruck, and impaled as any freshman.

But he's far worse off than any freshman. After all, a freshman can thump his leg, put on his linen duster, and take out after the coed with mad abandon. But what can the poor smitten prof do? How, in his position, can he go courting a young girl undergraduate?

In this column and the next one, I am going to deal with this difficult question. I will relate to you, in the form of a two act play, an account of a professor's attempt to woo a coed.

The scene is a typical office in a typical liberal arts building on a typical campus. In this shabby setting, we find two men, Professors Twonkey and Phipps. They are lumpy and bent, in the manner of English lit professors.

PHIPPS: Twonkey, a terrible thing has happened to me. A terrible, ghastly thing! I've fallen in love with a coed.

TWONKEY: Now, now, that's not so terrible.

PHIPPS: Oh, but it is. Miss McFetridge - for that is her name - is a student, a girl of nineteen. How would her parents feel if they knew I was gawking at her and refusing my food and writing her name on frosty windowpanes with my fingernail?

TWONKEY: Come now, Phipps, no need to carry on so. You're not the first teacher to cast warm eyes at a coed, you know.

PHIPPS: You mean it's happened to you too?

TWONKEY: But of course. Many times.

PHIPPS: What did you do about it?

TWONKEY: Looked at their knees. It never fails, Phipps. No matter how pretty a girl is, her knees are bound to be knobby and bony and the least romantic of objects.

PHIPPS: Not Miss McFetridge's - for that is her name. They are soft and round and dimpled. Also pink.

TWONKEY: Really? Well, I'll tell you something. Phipps. If I ever found a girl with pink knees, I'd marry her.

PHIPPS: It is my fondest wish, but how can I, a professor of fifty, start a courtship with a girl of 19?

TWONKEY: Very simple. Ask her to come to your office for a conference late tomorrow afternoon. When she arrives, be urbane, be charming. Ask her to sit down. Give her a cigarette.

PHIPPS: A Philip Morris.

TWONKEY: But of course.

PHIPPS: I just wanted to be sure you mentioned the name. They're paying for this column.

TWONKEY: Give her a Philip Morris.

PHIPPS: That's right.

TWONKEY: Then light her Philip Morris and light one yourself. Say some frightfully witty things about English lit. Be gay. Be innocuous. Keep her laughing for an hour or so. Then look at your watch. Cry out in surprise that you had no idea it was this late. Insist on driving her home.

PHIPPS: Yes, yes?

TWONKEY: On the way home, drive past that movie house that shows French films. Stop your car, as though on a sudden impulse. Tell her that you've heard the movie was delightfully Gallic and naughty. Ask her if she'd like to see it.

PHIPPS: Yes, yes?

TWONKEY: After the movie, say to her in a jocular, offhand way that after such a fine French movie, the only logical thing would be a fine French dinner. Take her to a funny little place you know, with candles and checked tablecloths. Ply her with burgundy and Philip Morris. Be witty. Be gay. Be Gallic. . . . How can a nineteen year old girl resist such blandishments?

PHIPPS: Twonkey, you're a genius! This will be like shooting fish in a barrel. . . . But I wonder if it isn't taking unfair advantage of the poor little innocent.

TWONKEY: Nonsense, Phipps. All's fair in love and war.

PHIPPS: You're right, by George. I'll do it!

(So ends Act I. Next week, Act II)

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